



PLAIN 10408 Pl-5,
REASONS
FOR BEING A
CHRISTIAN.

*Be ready always to give an answer to every
man that asketh you a reason of the hope
that is in you, with meekness and fear.
1 Pet. iii. 15.*

The THIRD EDITION, Corrected.



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R. H. A. S. O. N.

CHRISTIANITY



The Third Edition, Corrected



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PLAIN REASONS

FOR BEING A

CHRISTIAN.

INTRODUCTION.

AS I was born of parents, who bear the Christian Name, and was instructed by them from my earliest infancy in the principles and duties of Christianity, tho' this in it self is no reason why I should believe and submit to it ; yet I think in gratitude to them for their care in my education, and from the deference I owe to their natural authority over me, I am bound to examine the Religion in which they have brought me up, that I may know whether it be consistent with the truth and reason of things, and consequently worthy my acceptance and belief.

I am, indeed, abundantly persuaded, that Religion ought to be my own free and rational choice, and that conviction, and not human authority, must be the rule of my judgment concerning it : And as I was directed by my parents to examine and judge for my self, and find the Christian Religion in particular appealing to the

reason and consciences of mankind, I have endeavour'd to make the most impartial enquiry I am capable of; and upon the strictest examination,

I.

THE reason of my mind tells me, that there is a God, *i. e.* an eternal, all-perfect Being, the original cause and preserver of all things, the great author of all the relations and dependences of things upon each other, the creator, proprietor, and therefore natural lord and governor of all the reasonable creation.

From hence it follows, that all creatures who are capable of understanding their derivation from him, their dependance on him, and their relation to him, are indispensably and necessarily obliged to pay him those acknowledgments and services, which result from, and are suitable and proper to their respective circumstances and conditions.

And by consequence religion, *i. e.* the worship and service of God, is the necessary duty of every reasonable creature, and ought to be maintained and kept up in the world; and every man in particular is bound to make choice of that religion, which appears to him most consonant to reason, and to carry in it the most evident marks of its being from God, and most agreeable to his nature and will.

II.

AS I find that religion is the necessary duty of every reasonable creature, I am farther convinced of my obligation to make use of all the helps I can, to understand wherein the nature of it

it doth consist. And upon enquiry, I can think of but two ways by which I can come to the knowledge of it; and these are either the dictates of my own mind, and reason, or some informations, discoveries and revelations from God, the great object of my religious worship.

The reason of my mind is that which renders me capable of discerning what is fit and unfit in disposition and behaviour, arising from the relations of things; and from hence I derive the notion, and infer the reality of *moral* obligation. And when I farther consider the first independent mind as the author of these relations, and fitnesses which arise from them, I am convinced that it is his will that I should act suitable to them, and that I offend when I do not; and from hence I infer the certainty of *religious* obligation. And since this moral and religious obligation owes its rise only to my reflections upon the nature of man, and the relation I stand in to God and other beings, this is properly *natural religion*, or the religion of nature.

Now, tho' the religion of Nature be prior to and distinct from revealed religion, and gives the characters by which we are to judge of the truth of revelation; yet the expediency of a divine revelation, to lead men into a due knowledge of the principles, duties, and advantages of religion, appears;

From that gross ignorance of God, and duty, which sprung from the general corruption and degeneracy of mankind; which rendered it highly improbable that any one in such circumstances should arise, who should be able to make

the necessary discoveries of God and his perfections, and with clearness and solidity to represent mens obligations in their proper extent and compass; at least not without those mixtures of weakness and superstition, which might occasion the vicious and prejudiced to disregard his instructions, and thus abate the general success of them.

But if we could suppose his doctrines to be pure and unmixed, it is not probable, they would have a general or indeed any considerable influence over the strong bias that vice universally practised had given to men, without the marks of a proper authority to awaken them to consideration; especially as those doctrines could not but want the motives and encouragements proportionate to such an effect.

It is indeed probable, that in such a situation men might be led to see, that by acting contrary to the reason and fitness of things they had offended the first and most perfect mind; the natural consequence of this would be fear of punishment. This fear must be infinite and boundless, as the power of God is conceived to be unlimited, and as the nature and duration of the punishment would be absolutely unknown. A consideration highly unfavourable to all endeavours to break off their sinful habits, and attain to the contrary habits of virtue.

However, if we could suppose men by such a fear of punishment persuaded to repentance, *i. e.* to cease from acting contrary to the fitness of things, and to conform themselves for the future to it; their former violation of this unalterable law of reason would remain, and can't in

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strict speaking be undone by any better behaviour afterwards ; and of consequence their fears of punishment must remain.

If we suppose that mens natural notions of the divine goodness, and the forbearance that God exercises in the course of his providence, would lead them to think it probable that repentance would secure them from the dreaded punishment ; such probability would in the nature of things be mixed with the greatest uncertainty ; especially because upon consideration, men, in the circumstances we now place them, would find, after all, their deviations from the law of reason many, and their virtue imperfect ; and therefore there would still be uneasy suspicions whether it be consistent with the wisdom of the supreme Governor, entirely to remit the punishment due to such repeated offences.

If we suppose that men might reason themselves into this firm persuasion and hope, that a return to a sincere, tho' imperfect virtue, would secure them from the deserved evil ; yet this will not lay a solid foundation to expect that happiness, and those marks of the divine favour, which might have been hoped for, if there had been no deviations from the rule of right and fit. Here the light of nature is at an entire loss, and can never give men the necessary assurances in this important article.

If it should appear inconsistent with the perfections of Deity not to make a distinction between those who return to virtue, and those who obstinately continue to act contrary to the fitness of things ; yet the degree and manner of doing it will still remain doubtful and uncertain, this
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being wholly dependant on the unknown pleasure and wisdom of God. And of consequence the light of nature cannot determine, whether an imperfect virtue may not have suitable degrees of punishment in another state; or if the probability should preponderate on the other side, that God would reward a sincere, tho' imperfect virtue, reason could never assure us, of what nature that reward should be, nor how long its continuance.

As every man finds himself liable to death, a resurrection could scarcely be made appear by the light of nature probable, much less a resurrection accompanied with such favourable alterations as the Christian religion discovers. In a word, if the light of nature could assure me of a future state, it could never make me certain that it should be a state of rewards, since the virtue of this life is so very imperfect, that the other life might prove a new state of farther trial.

But if it could go so far as to render it probable, that it should be a state of recompence; yet wherein the rewards of it consist, and how long their continuance and duration shall be, it is so little capable of giving any distinct account of, that the greatest and wisest of men, who had no other guide but this, appear to have lived and died in the greatest uncertainties about them; a full proof that the light of nature is not able to instruct us in these important articles with any sufficient clearness and certainty. The consequence of which is, that men would want the proper arguments and motives to become virtuous with steadiness and constancy, against all the difficulties and temptations of a general and universal degeneracy.

III.

SINCE therefore the natural reason of my mind appears thus greatly defective, and insufficient, I have considered the other method of discovering the will of God, and the principles and duties of religion, *viz.* immediate revelation from God himself. And as this involves no contradiction in the nature of the thing, it must be possible to him, to whom belongs supreme and unlimited power. *Shall not he that made the eye see?* He that gave us all our conversable powers, shall he not be able to converse with us himself? Shall not the father of spirits, who is intimately present to every being, have an access to his own offspring, so as to assure the mind, that it is he himself, by such evidence as shall make it unreasonable to deny, or impossible to doubt it? If men can make themselves known, and discover their secret thoughts to each other, surely God can make himself known to men; else we must suppose his power more bounded than theirs, and that he wants a real perfection which they are possess'd of.

And as this is possible, my reason farther tells me 'tis highly desirable, the better to instruct me what God is, and what I am my self; what I must do, and what I shall be; to save men the labour of a slow and tedious compass of observation, experience and argument, which every one is not fit for, and which those who are, would be glad to be assisted in; to free me from the uncertainties and fears of my mind, that arise from the consciousness of guilt, the sense of my being accountable, and the apprehensions I have of a future state; to regulate my conduct, and guide me

me with safety in the midst of prevailing ignorance and darkness, the mistakes and corruptions of mankind, the snares of bad examples, and the numerous temptations to folly and vice ; to establish my hopes, by fixing the rule of worship, settling the conditions of pardon, assuring me of necessary assistance, and promising such rewards as are proper to support me under all the difficulties of my present duty. These things *the world by wisdom knew not* ; they were vain and mistaken in their imagination, and their foolish heart was darken'd.

And as such a revelation is both possible and desirable, the probability that there hath been one may be fairly argued, from the universal ignorance and corruption that hath overspread the world, the characters of God as Father and Governor of mankind, the acknowledged goodness and equity of his nature, the sudden and astonishing reformation that hath once been in the world, the numerous pretences that have been made to revelation in all ages and nations ; which seem to argue the general consent of mankind, as to the expediency and reality of it, and its necessity to give Religion its proper certainty, authority, and force.

If then there be any religion in the world that fairly makes out its title to be a revelation from God, by such internal characters belonging to it, and such external proofs attending it, which are fit and proper in themselves to convince a reasonable and impartial enquirer, and may be justly expected in a matter of such importance ; I am bound to acknowledge and submit to such a Religion, and to receive it under the honour-
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able character of a divine revelation. And as the Christian Religion makes its pretensions to such a character and authority, I have endeavoured fairly to examine the proofs and evidence that attend it, as they are contain'd in those books which are known by the name of the New Testament, to which Christians appeal, as to the infallible rule of their faith and practice, and the sole judge of all controversies in their religion. And upon the most unprejudiced enquiry, I find,

IV.

THAT there is the highest reason to believe, that these books are authentick and genuine, there being the same, or rather greater proofs of their being written by the persons whose names they bear, and to whom they are ascribed, than any other antient books have, tho' of the clearest credit, and most unquestionable authority. This is supported by the testimony of many writers, who either were the contemporaries of the authors of the books of the New Testament, or lived immediately after them; who frequently quote and refer to them, both amongst Christians themselves, who transcribe many parts of them in their works, and amongst the *Jews* and *Heathens*, who expressly mention them as the authors of the books ascribed to them, tho' they had the greatest aversion to the Christian Religion, their interest obliged them to disprove it, and they had all the opportunity and power in their hands to do it. So that here there is an universal agreement, without any contrary claim, or pretension to other authors.

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That the accounts they have given us in their writings are genuine and true, I argue from the characters and circumstances of the writers themselves. They were persons of undoubted integrity, as appears by the innocence of their lives, their solemn appeals to God, the strict obligations they were under to truth by the principles of their own religion, their inculcating truth and sincerity upon others by the noblest motives, their having no worldly interest to bias them, and their cheerfully sealing their testimony they gave by their blood.

They had the most certain knowledge of the things of which they wrote, which were either doctrines that they received immediately from Christ himself, or the inspiration of his Spirit, or facts, done in their own times, and of which they were either eye-witnesses, or principal agents, and which have been preserved by publick memorials and solemn rites, that have obtained in all ages of the Christian Church.

Their education, capacities, and circumstances of life, render'd it impossible for them to invent so rational, consistent and grand a scheme as the Christian Religion contains. They wrote at divers times and places, upon different occasions, sudden emergencies, and important controversies, which prevented any reasonable suspicions of combination or united fraud.

The several accounts they give of the people, and affairs of the time in which, according to their own relation, the things they report happen'd, entirely agree with other writers of undoubted authority; which is a very strong

presumption of their being authentick and agreeable to truth.

That these writings are still the same, without any material alterations, is evident from the great value and credit they have been always in amongst Christians, who ever esteemed them as the rule of their faith and life, and the ground of their comfort and hope ; from their being publickly read in the Christian churches, as a part of their solemn worship ; their being early translated from authentick copies, which long continued in the Christian church, into most of the known languages of the world, and the harmony and agreement of such translations ; from the quotations made from them, still remaining in antient writers ; from the constant appeals made to them by the various sects, that appeared amongst Christians, in all matters controverted by them ; for which reason they could not be corrupted in any material points, either by common consent, or by any particular parties amongst themselves. So that they have no marks of fraud and imposture upon them, but are attended with every character of their being genuine and pure ; and have been handed down in the main without any adulteration or mixture, thro' many successions of ages, notwithstanding the violence of persecution, the strict search and enquiry into them, the errors and corruptions that have been introduced into the church, the interest of crafty, superstitious, and designing men to add to, or take from them, and the endeavours of tyrants utterly to destroy them, by their own intrinsick

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excellency and evidence, and the special protection and care of providence.

Upon these considerations, I am abundantly convinced, that the books of the New Testament have all the evidence which any antient writings have, or can have, of their being authentick and genuine ; and that therefore 'tis unreasonable to call this matter into question, when so many other writings are universally owned upon much less evidence ; no man of common sense pretending to doubt of the genuineness and truth of them. And therefore, whatsoever account these writings give of the nature of the Christian religion, I am bound to receive as the true account, and to examine its authority by those facts, which they relate as the proper evidence and proof of it. Now as I should naturally expect to find in a revelation that is really from God, suitable and worthy accounts of his perfections and attributes ; so,

V.

I farther find, to my great satisfaction, that the things spoken of God in the Christian revelation, are suitable to those notions of him, which I can prove the truth of, by the reason of my own mind, and which have been entertained by the wisest and best of men in all ages and nations of the world. The light of nature can firmly demonstrate, and the most thoughtful and learned heathens have agreed in, the necessity of God's existence, the absolute perfection of his nature, his immensity and absolute unchangeableness ; his comprehensive knowledge, his infinite wisdom, and his almighty power ;

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the rectitude of his nature, his boundless and extensive goodness; and his impartial equity and justice; his being the creator of the world; his being the supreme Lord and governour of universal nature, and the father and friend of mankind; his being a lover of virtue, and determined finally to accept and reward it.

Now the records of the Christian revelation are so far from containing any thing contrary to these apprehensions, that they confirm, enlarge and enforce them. They speak of his necessary existence in a noble and comprehensive way. They describe him as filling all things, and as without the least *variableness or shadow of turning*. As *the King immortal, invisible, and eternal*. As having life in himself. As the searcher of the heart, and knowing all things. As God only, *i. e.* supremely infinitely wise. As irresistible in power. As absolutely holy. As rich in goodness. As just in his procedure. As the creator of the worlds visible and invisible. As upholding all things by the word of his power. As the observer of mens actions, a lover of their virtue, and ready to assist them in it and reward it. It gives the noblest representations of his claims of worship and obedience from all his reasonable creatures, of his peculiar love to mankind, and his especial favour to all the virtuous and good. It describes him to our minds as seated on his throne of grace, as sending a person of the highest character, to lead men, by his example and instructions, to knowledge and piety, to peace of conscience and eternal happiness. As dispensing by him pardon to the penitent, comfort to the afflicted, hope to the

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miserable,

miserable, and life to sinners under the condemnation of sin and death. As having appointed a day for universal judgment, as judging all in righteousness according to their deeds, and the advantages they enjoy, as the final punisher of the impenitently wicked, and as the everlasting portion and reward of all, who *by a patient continuance in well doing, seek after glory, honour, and immortality.* These representations of God my mind and reason highly approve of and when I read them in the Christian records, they awaken my admiration, fill my soul with the warmest love, and excite within me a becoming reverence and godly fear.

VI.

AS the Christian religion gives the noblest representations of the attributes of God, I farther find that it requires the most rational and excellent worship of him; the *worshippers whom the Father declares he now seeks,* being such only as *worship him in spirit and in truth.* The rule of the gospel extends only to decency and order, but contains no directions about external pomp and pageantry. The method of worship it prescribes is not so much by positive rites and ceremonies, that have no intrinsic worth and excellency in them; as by a steady belief and worthy apprehensions of his perfections and providence, by fervent love, by reverence and godly fear, by hope in his mercy, by submission to his will, by the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart, by gratitude, adoration, and praise, and by fervent humble supplication and prayer. In a word, by the exercise of all
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holy dispositions, by purity of soul, and a constant careful imitation of God in all the virtues of an holy life.

I find all the writings of the New Testament abound with precepts of this kind ; and as to such positive institutions as are enjoined by it, they are but few, and these not burthensome in their observance, not pompous and costly, not tending to and encouraging of superstition ; but plain and significant, designed either to represent the peculiar purity of the Christian profession, when men take it on them, or as memorials to perpetuate the remembrance of those important facts, upon the certainty and knowledge of which the authority and efficacy of Christianity doth entirely depend : and at the same time suited in every part of them to promote the purposes of piety, and universal fervent charity ; appointed as obligations upon men to be more careful and exemplary in their behaviour, and to abound in all the virtues of a good life ; and to assure them on the part of God, that if they act agreeable to their obligations and profession as Christians, they shall be made partakers of the most valuable and durable blessings in his everlasting kingdom and glory.

And tho' these institutions are supported by the authority of an express command, yet in order to prevent all possible abuse of them, the Christian religion farther expressly declares, that whatever claims men may hereafter make to the rewards of a better world, from their having worn the name of Christ, or enjoy'd the external privileges of his religion, they shall not be

be accepted upon this foundation ; but that they themselves shall be rejected, if they are found workers of iniquity ; and that none but such as fear God and work righteousness, shall receive the recompence of righteousness and glory.

And therefore I am pleased farther to observe, that as the Christian religion places the worship of God in the exercise of suitable affections, and in the regular piety and virtue of a good life, it farther lays down and inculcates such rules and precepts of substantial holiness, as are reasonable in themselves, perfect in their kind, and well approved of by my judgment and conscience. Such which I find are in their nature, conducive to promote the health, the honour, the reputation, the usefulness, the worldly prosperity, the peace and satisfaction of every individual person living and dying ; such which are suited to the particular stations, characters, and circumstances of men in life ; and which are therefore calculated to promote the ends of civil government, and the peace and welfare of civil society ; enjoining all to cultivate and maintain the most fervent charity and love, to be merciful in disposition and practice, to follow the things that make for peace, not to receive men to doubtful disputations, not to censure or judge one another upon account of differences in opinions, but that such as are strong should bear with the weak, and all endeavour to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace ; doing good for evil, loving and praying for our enemies, and chearfully forgiving offences and injuries against us. So that however Christianity may have been abused by some,

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to support a secular interest, I am abundantly convinced 'tis not from any tendency of its precepts to disturb the order of civil government, or alter the constitution and form of it amongst any nations of the world; the great view of it being to engage men to govern their passions; to be of the most just, generous and friendly dispositions to others, to discharge the duties of their respective stations, either employing themselves in honest labours, or publick services; magistrates ruling diligently as ministers of God for good, and subjects living quiet lives in all godliness and honesty.

VII.

AS the worship which the Christian religion enjoins is thus worthy of God, and all its precepts for the conduct of life thus rational and perfect; so I farther find the motives it proposes are weighty and sufficient, if duly considered and attended to, to determine men in the choice of that course which it recommends, all of them worthy the perfections of the blessed God, and suited to the circumstances of his degenerate, offending, and guilty creatures.

The assurance of pardon thro' the Blood of Christ, and of the assistance of his good spirit under all the difficulties of our present duty, are exceedingly favourable, and carry in them the noblest encouragement to obnoxious and disabled sinners, when they entertain the Thoughts of returning to God their sovereign and happiness; and indeed absolutely necessary to reconcile them to, and render them successful in such an attempt. For what heart can any one have

to begin the difficult work of breaking off his sins, and to enter upon a life of holiness; or what prospect of success, but under the comfortable assurance that his past offences shall be forgiven, and that he shall receive all necessary assistances from God for the future, in struggling with the difficulties that attend the practice of virtue?

The intercession of so compassionate and powerful a friend with God, as *Jesus Christ* is represented to be, is a very firm ground of support, and inspires considerate minds with a chearful hope of having their persons and services accepted, and of receiving all the necessary supports and blessings of life, whatever opposition they may meet with from the enemies of true religion, and even tho' they should be exposed to the severest persecutions upon account of their adherence to it.

The prospect and full assurance of his coming to raise the dead, and judge the world, and give eternal life, to reward his faithful followers with everlasting happiness, and to punish the wicked with an everlasting destruction, is an argument abundantly sufficient to persuade men immediately to enter upon the ways of holiness and virtue, and to engage them to persevere in them with chearfulness to the last. Especially considering, that good men are assured that all the inconveniences of life shall be made tolerable and useful to them, and death, the dread of nature, shall be their introduction into rest, and the commencement of their felicity. In a word, the gospel sets before men every consideration to encourage virtue, and deter from vice, and gives them particularly

cularly such assurances of retributions in the other world, as that no stronger motives whatsoever can be desired or needed to make them wise, and good, and happy, if they will but suffer them to have their proper and natural influence upon their minds.

VIII.

AS the gospel-precepts of religion and virtue, and the motives set before men to engage them to the love and practice of it, are worthy of God, and suitable to their circumstances and desires, so the peculiar doctrines of Christianity relating to *Jesus Christ*, the great author and dispenser of it, are such as demand the highest regard; such as no founder of any other religion could ever pretend to, and yet such as are entirely consistent with the principles of natural religion, and all the certain discoveries of reason; such as are sublime and grand in themselves, uniform and consistent with each other, plain and intelligible in the main and essential points; and such as add great strength and force to natural religion, as they have an entire and absolute tendency to promote godliness and virtue.

Thus 'tis declared of him, that he was before the formation of the world, the word that was with God, and God, the brightness of his father's glory, and the express image of his person, that the father by him created all things, that by him all things consist; that he came down from a state of heavenly glory to be made flesh, and dwell amongst us; that he came from the very bosom of his father, and had that perfect and complete knowledge of his father's will, that no
other

other messenger from him ever had, or could have ; that to enable him the better to reveal it to mankind, he had a body miraculously prepared for him, which was conceived, and born without sin, but in all sinless infirmities like unto his brethren, in the present suffering, afflicted state of the human nature ; that in this body he chose such a condition of life, as gave him an opportunity of conversing most familiarly with all sorts of persons, became an example of the most perfect purity and goodness, by his own lowliness and meekness disgracing the pride and passions of the world, and teaching men to place all real excellency and greatness, in honouring the great God and father of all, and doing good to their fellow-creatures, even to the worst and meanest of mankind.

That so much greatness should condescend to put on such a veil, and so glorious a being give such amazing proofs of goodness, is beyond all parallel. It is indeed peculiar to the character of *Jesus Christ*, to be possess'd of the glories of the deity, and yet to stoop to the lowest state of human nature ; to be lord of lords, and yet the meekest humblest man, that ever dwelt on earth ; to appear amongst men under the form of a servant, and to be made of no reputation, and yet at the same time to be honour'd by a voice from heaven, declaring, *this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

However, notwithstanding this amazing condescension, great humility, and meanness of outward form, he is represented as assuming an authority worthy the Son of God ; an authority and right to settle the terms of men's acceptance with

with God, according as he had received power from his father ; an authority to forgive sins on earth, so as that they should be forgiven in heaven, and so to retain sins, as that they should remain unpardonable in a future state ; an authority and power to send the spirit of his father, and constitute him the prime minister of his kingdom amongst men ; that by his extraordinary and miraculous gifts he might confirm the gospel, and make it successful upon its first publication ; and afterwards in every age, continually accompany it with such impressions on the hearts of men, as in the efficacy and design of them, should correspond to those more extraordinary gifts, which were poured out on Christians in common at their first embracing the gospel : and finally, an authority to raise the dead, and judge them when restored to life ; to send all the workers of iniquity into everlasting punishment, and to reward all who sincerely believe in him and obey him, with eternal happiness.

But notwithstanding these high pretensions, 'tis farther declared of him ; that he died the ignominious and accursed death of the cross, that he died a sacrifice for the sins of the world, that by his death he drew all men to himself, and brought to pass that great mystery of calling in the Gentiles, taking away the difference between them and the *Jews*, making them one household and family ; thus founding his kingdom upon his own blood, and not on the blood of his enemies and opposers.

But tho' he died to answer these ends, yet the same records testify, that in spite of all the malice and opposition of his enemies, he rose again the
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third day, effectually to remove the offence and scandal of his own cross, and to give an exemplar and sure proof of the resurrection of others by his power, at the end of the world : That after his resurrection he abode forty days on earth, to settle the affairs of his kingdom with his disciples, commanding them to preach his gospel, sending them forth in such a style of majesty, as could never be equal'd by any earthly monarch, or author of any other revelation : *All power is given me in heaven and in earth* ; and assuring them that the terms upon which they should declare men acquitted or condemned, partakers of eternal life or death, under the infallible conduct of his spirit, should be ratified and confirmed in heaven : in this sense intrusting them with, not only the erection and ordering his kingdom upon earth, but also with the keys of heaven and hell.

After this commission granted to his apostles, 'tis declared of him, that in their presence he ascended into the heavens, a cloud receiving him out of their sight, leading captivity captive, triumphing over those powers of darkness, whose works he came into the world to destroy, spoiling those principalities and powers, those spiritual wickednesses in high places ; that he was seated on his father's right hand, angels being made subject to him, and the god of this world, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience, being put under his feet, and reserved by him to be finally bruised at the judgment of the great day.

And lastly, the same records that give an account of his investiture with this high dignity and office, do with great consistency and propriety declare, that the father hath committed all
judgment

judgment to him, that all shall appear before his judgment-seat ; that when he shall come to execute this important trust, he shall appear in his own glory, and in his original form of God, all the holy angels attending him, and solemnly waiting round his tribunal. That then he shall be seated on the throne of his glory, that all nations shall be gathered before him, that he shall separate them one from another on his right hand, and on his left, pass sentence on them, and thereby determine their everlasting state ; that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous be adjudged to life eternal ; that he shall present them blameless before his father's glory, and that as the conclusion of all, he himself shall lay down all rule, and all authority and power, deliver up the kingdom to God even the Father, become subject unto him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

A scheme so sublime and grand, so consistent with the prerogatives of the great God, so suitable to the high dignity and infinite merits of the Son of God, so calculated to awaken men to virtue and piety, carries in it all the characters of probability and truth, and highly deserves the most attentive consideration and regard.

IX.

AS these peculiar doctrines of Christianity carry their own recommendation along with them, and appear worthy to be received for their intrinsic excellency, so they come to us attended with many clear and convincing demonstrations, that it is the will of God we should regard them as truths coming from him, and as revealed

to us by his special order and appointment, for our recovery, improvement and perfection.

Jesus of Nazareth, the person from whom these doctrines receive their general name, and are called *Christian*, was called the *Christ*, because he made pretensions to a divine mission, and always thought and spoke of himself as *anointed* and empowered by God to make these discoveries of his will to men, declaring himself the Son of God, and that person whom the *Jews*, with whom he lived and conversed, had been all along train'd up and taught to look for. And of the truth of these pretensions he gave sufficient evidence to every unprejudiced and attentive observer.

It was very wisely ordered, that just before his appearance in the world, there should arise one who should prepare men for his coming, and give notice of his approach. This *John the Baptist* did, preaching in the spirit and power of *Elias*, and saying, *Prepare ye the way of the Lord*; and tho' he did no miracle, yet by his virtuous and strict deportment, his self-denial, his pathetick exhortations, his bold and impartial admonitions and reproofs, he obtained the character of a great prophet. This man bare witness concerning Jesus, and the things he said of him could not but attract the eyes of men towards him, and raise great expectations from him; and the gradual accomplishment of several things which *John* had foretold of him was at least some evidence that Jesus was a very extraordinary person, and was suited to keep every honest and impartial mind open to any farther proofs that Jesus might produce of his pretensions and mission from God.

And of these he gave many during his life and ministry that were beyond all reasonable exception. He wrought many great miracles, *i. e.* did many things evidently and confessedly above all human power and skill to effect. He healed the sick, and cured all manner of diseases, such as by all the art and efficacy of medicine had been found incurable ; inveterate palsies and lunacies. He opened the ears of the deaf, loosed the tongues of the dumb, made the lame to walk, rendered the maimed perfect, opened the eyes of those that had been born blind, and raised the dead. These amazing works he performed in an instant, even by the speaking of a word, in the cities and towns of the country where he lived, in places of the most publick resort, before multitudes of his enemies as well as friends, and at such seasons, and at such particular places, on the sabbath, and in the synagogues, as he well knew would occasion the most critical and narrow enquiry into all the circumstances of the facts. All these things he performed without any ostentation or vain-glory. In all his most publick miracles there was always some circumstance or other, which plainly shewed that they were intended for the conviction of those who saw them, and not to gain applause to himself.

But besides these extraordinary works, he answered all those characters which the prophets of former ages had given of the Messiah. As he was promised under the character of *a prophet like unto Moses*, but whose office was to be more general and extensive than that of *Moses*, as one who was to be *a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of his people Israel* ; he accordingly

cordingly came furnished and commissioned to instruct all mankind, *Jew and Gentile*, in every important truth, that they were concerned to know, in order to their obtaining the divine acceptance, and the happiness of a future state ; commanding all nations to be disciplined, taught and proselyted, that *all-men might come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved.*

As he was foretold under the character of a King, as *the Son of man*, to whom should be given a kingdom, dominion and power ; so Jesus came asserting his right to a kingdom, setting up the kingdom of God amongst men, and claiming and exercising a rightful authority over their hearts and consciences.

As he was described under the character of a priest, who was to make *his Soul an offering for Sin*, so he is declared to be *an high priest over the house of God*, to have put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and to be able to save, to the uttermost, *all that come unto God by him, because he lives to make intercession for them.*

He appeared just at that time when a person of such a character was generally and reasonably expected ; just as the Scepter was departing from *Judah*, and at the period fixed and determined by the prophecy of *Daniel*.

He came of the nation, tribe, and particular family, from which it was prophesied he should descend, being of the seed of *Abraham*, the tribe of *Judah*, and house of *David* ; and by a wonderful interposition of providence born at *Bethlehem*, the place from whence was to come forth he who was to be ruler in Israel.

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When he appeared and conversed amongst men, his disposition and behaviour were suited both to the character he sustained, and to the prophecies that had been given out concerning him. He was meek and lowly in heart, holy and without blame, so that his most inveterate and malicious enemies could not convince him of sin.

His circumstances in life were exactly such as they were foretold they should be. He was *despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*. He lived in want of many of the conveniences, and sometimes of the very necessities of life, and was subject to reproach, and the most ungrateful and inhuman usage. At last he was *led as a lamb to the slaughter*, suffered death as a malefactor, and was *cut off for the transgressions of the people*. All this he endured without murmuring, complaining, reviling again, or threatening. His enemies and accusers, his judges, executioners and guards, his friends and relations, and a numberless multitude of curious and inquisitive spectators judged, saw, and knew him to be dead. He was taken from the cross, buried in his sepulchre, and yet rose again from the dead, and by this resurrection he was *declared to be the Son of God with power*, beyond all possible contradiction.

During his life and ministry he had often mentioned this great event as what should certainly come to pass, resting and laying the stress of his pretensions upon it; sometimes in plain words, at other times in figurative expressions, declaring how long he should continue in the grave, and in the state of the dead, *viz.* three days and three nights, *i. e.* part of three days and three nights.

Accordingly on the third day he rose, and shew'd himself alive to his disciples, whom he had chosen to be his stated companions, with this particular view, that they might be qualified to testify the most remarkable facts which occurred in his life, and that they might be proper and unexceptionable witnesses of his Resurrection from the dead.

And as they have unanimously declared this to the world, there is no just reason to object to their testimony. For in asserting this, they assert what they so knew themselves as that they could not be deceived in. They knew the person, features, manner and speech of Jesus. They were allowed to handle him, that they might be sure they were not imposed on by an airy Phantasm, and delusive appearance only. They had free and familiar converse with him, and that repeatedly in the space of forty days. He discoursed to them largely on subjects, of which he had before his death given them more general hints, and renewed the great promise he had made them in his former life, of pouring out his spirit on them, with this additional circumstance, that it should be made good to them not many days from the time of his speaking to them.

Upon these accounts it can't be supposed that these witnesses could be deceived themselves in what they relate, nor is there any reason to think that they attempted to deceive others, by bearing witness to the truth of a known imposture. For as to what appears, they were persons of honest minds, not crafty, covetous, ambitious and designing: they had no temptation to invent such a story, or publish it if they had not known it to be

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true. They had no prospect of gain or worldly grandeur, however successful they might prove in propagating the story. The doctrine they taught enjoins the strictest regard to veracity, and the greatest abhorrence of fraud and guile, under the most solemn and awful sanctions. Their testimony was uniform and consistent in all the parts of it. If the story had been forged, those who opposed and endeavoured to stifle it, might easily have detected the forgery; the surest, nearest, and plainest way to expose the authors, abettors, and believers of it, and to prevent its spreading in the world. But instead of this, they loaded the witnesses with hardships of every kind. Reproach, shame, poverty, bonds, imprisonments, scourgings, &c. were the arguments made use of by their enemies to stop their mouths. Nothing of this kind silenced them, or made any one of them to retract. They cheerfully underwent the severest persecutions, and submitted to death itself, rather than they would deny or conceal what they knew to be a truth of the last importance to mankind.

In short, a testimony so circumstanced as this is, in any other case, never did, nor ever can be disputed or disbelieved, but in any age and place would, and in any time or country still will meet with a general credit and reception from all reasonable and fair men, without any cavil, hesitation, or demur.

As Jesus Christ did in his life-time, and after his resurrection, promise his disciples, that they should receive his spirit, or power from on high, he accordingly pour'd it down upon them, in all its extraordinary and miraculous gifts, and thereby

thereby manifestly proved his ascension to the right hand of power and glory.

Besides this, the divine mission and authority of Jesus Christ is farther established by the actual and exact accomplishment of those important events, which he expressly and clearly foretold many years before they came to pass.

He publickly declared before multitudes that heard him as well as his own disciples, that the city of *Jerusalem*, and its glory the temple, should in a few years be utterly laid waste and destroyed, and that the gospel which was at first offered to the *Jews* and rejected by them, should be taken away from amongst them, and be tendered to the *Gentiles*; and that persons of all nations and languages under heaven should receive and become profelytes to his religion; and that the gates of hell should not prevail against his church, but that he would be with it to the end of the world.

These remarkable events, though at the time when he foretold them they were far from being probable, tho' there appeared no signs or tokens that should lead to such a conjecture, did nevertheless come to pass exactly according to his prediction. Before the generation of men to whom he addressed himself had passed away, *Jerusalem* became desolate, and the nation was destroyed; and the history of that dreadful calamity, as it is related by *Josephus*, doth remarkably agree with the prophetick account given by Jesus concerning it, as it is very circumstantial-ly recorded by the evangelists.

And after the apostles had in vain attempted to persuade the *Jewish* nation and people to receive the Christian religion, they turned themselves to
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the *Gentiles*, who in almost every place, where the gospel was preached to them, shewed a better disposition, and minds more open to evidence and conviction ; multitudes of the *Gentiles* receiving the word with gladness and all readiness of mind.

And notwithstanding the tares that have been sown, the strifes and divisions which have been excited and fomented, the declensions and degeneracy of many Christian professors, the persecutions with which the avowed enemies of the Christian church have frequently worried it, and the anti-christian spirit that for many ages hath shewn itself amongst the greater part of those who have born the Christian name ; notwithstanding christianity hath been often moved from one place to another, and in many nations entirely suppressed ; notwithstanding the objections that have been urged against the doctrines of Christianity, and the contempt, ridicule, and insolence with which the person and miracles of Jesus have been treated ; yet still the religion of Christ continues unto this day, in its external profession, and internal efficacy : Not by might nor power, but by the spirit and favour and blessing of God, and its own native excellency and intrinsic worth.

From these considerations, I am even forced to acknowledge and reverence the divine character and mission of the Son of God, and to receive his religion in all the parts and branches of it as a revelation immediately from God.

X.

AS Jesus Christ himself, the great founder of the Christian religion, had this full evidence and substantial

substantial proof of his own authority and commission from God ; and that he was a man approved of God, by wonders, signs, and miracles, which God did by him ; and as he was sent to publish a new institution of religion, not only for one nation and people, but for all nations and people of the earth : so the same books which shew this, farther shew that he took care to propagate and confirm the religion he taught, by chusing the most proper means and instruments to carry on and perfect it, and persuade men to receive it.

And therefore, before he left the world himself, and ended his own personal ministry, he chose several persons to be his apostles and messengers, who should afterwards publish his religion to the world with sufficient authority, and qualifications for so great a work as the delivering a new revelation and rule of religion to mankind.

By a near acquaintance and constant conversation with him, they were proper persons to be credible witnesses of all his miracles, and in particular of his resurrection, that great evidence that he was approved of God ; and farther to acquaint the world what were the truths he taught, and what were the rules of worship he appointed, having had such opportunity to know them by his personal and private instructions.

To give the greater weight to what they should teach the world as his religion, he gave them authority, by a solemn commission, in virtue of that full power that was given him in heaven and earth, to teach all nations, and make them his disciples, and to enter them as such by baptism, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, requiring them to observe all things whatsoever

he had commanded them. And such authority and commission from one already approved a teacher sent from God, justly gave credit to what they should teach in his name, or declare concerning him, either as to what they had seen themselves, or received in command from him to deliver unto others.

But besides this, their authority and qualifications to publish this religion to all nations are evidenced by many other plain and convincing proofs. For they had not only the benefit of his personal instructions and directions, all the time of their conversation with him, but he had promised to send to them the spirit of truth after his removal from them, and that this spirit, when he came, should guide them into all truths, farther necessary to perfect his institution of religion. This promise was again solemnly repeated after his resurrection to his apostles, whom, being assembled together with them, he commanded that they should not depart from Jerusalem, *but wait for the promise of the father, which, says he, ye have heard of me; for John truly baptized you with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence; and ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.*

This remarkable promise was soon after accomplished; for whilst they were together upon the day of Pentecost, there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost,

Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the spirit gave them utterance, tho' before they had been utterly unacquainted with them. Their minds were in an instant illuminated, and filled with a clear and distinct knowledge of those important truths, which to that time had been absolutely, or in great measure unknown to them. They had at the same time convey'd to them a power of healing all manner of diseases, of doing miracles, even of raising the dead to life, of prophecy or predicting future events, and of conferring these extraordinary gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost upon others; which was so commonly done, and so well known, that *Simon*, who by his forceries had deceived many to account of him as the great power of God, offer'd money to the apostles, that he like them might have the power to give the Holy Ghost by laying on of hands.

These gifts of the spirit of God were such in their nature, as no human power or wisdom could confer, such as none of the exorcists or forcerers of those times, with all their cunning and art, management and reputation amongst the people, could counterfeit. They were so many and publick, as gave the most clear and undeniable evidence of the apostles mission from God and Christ, greatly animated them in the work they were called to, and contributed much to their success. This effusion of the spirit was a publick affirmance of their private testimony concerning Christ, and added the weight of prophecy and miracles to the credibility of true and faithful witnesses.

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But besides all this, the manner of their instruction greatly recommended the testimony they gave, and the doctrines they taught. This was in all respects such as it became the best of men, and the wisest of religions to use. Never did men give greater instances of honesty and sincerity, and a firmer persuasion of the truth of what they taught. Never did men appear more disinterested and faithful in what they declared they had received from God. In all distant places, and on many different occasions, there still appeared an exact harmony of doctrine, and a constant union in promoting the same cause; so that the same spirit of truth appeared to direct them all, as they had all received the same spirit of power. Their hearts and lives were under the constant direction and influence of the power and spirit of real religion. As they had all received the same miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, they were all animated with the same just and regular zeal. All shew'd the same firmness of mind, tempered with the same modesty, meekness and humility. Their own religion gave them the noblest supports under the many and great sufferings they endured; and that no proof of their sincerity and faithfulness might be wanting, they sealed the truth of the doctrines they taught with their blood, and gave up their own lives to the hopes of that future happiness, they proposed in the name of their master to others.

And lastly, as truth and religion stand in no need of artifice and violence, the Apostles openly renounced all such methods of propagating the religion of Christ, directing men to *bold*

the mystery of faith in a pure conscience. They imposed on no man's judgment, they openly disclaimed all dominion over their faith and consciences, they reasoned with them out of the scriptures, and instead of forcing their own interpretations upon them, commended them for searching the scriptures whether the things were so. With all the Authority their commission gave them, confirmed by many signs and wonders, they yet appealed to the judgments of men by fair arguments, and aimed at persuading the conscience by the conviction of reason, not to overbear it by the force of authority.

It was indeed highly fit and necessary, that when they had approved the Religion they taught to men's consciences, and their own authority and commission by sufficient evidence, they, as the ministers and apostles of Christ, should both command and exhort in his name, and publish the rules of his religion, as his commands of binding obligation and authority; for this reason, that he is the lawgiver of the church. Thus the Apostles acted. When they had first proved the truth of their doctrine by fair reason and argument, and their own commission by the demonstration of the spirit, and of power; that the faith of the church should not stand on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God, it was necessary that they who were to publish Christ's religion, should teach whatever he commanded them, and themselves command and exhort obedience to them.

These were the methods the Apostles of Christ used in teaching his religion, and it accordingly met with success beyond human expectation.

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And tho' the prevalence of an opinion is no sure argument of truth, yet when principles contrary to men's inclinations and interests make their way only by evidence, and the force of reason and argument, against all methods of long and violent opposition, it is a very strong presumption of their truth, and that such success must be owing to the power of God attending it. And to suppose that such a religion as Christianity should prevail as it did, and by such means, without a miracle, would it self in reality be one of the greatest of miracles.

XI.

FROM these arguments and evidences I cannot but be convinced that *Jesus* was a person sent from God, and that his Apostles acted by his commission and authority, and that therefore the whole Christian religion, as contained in the New Testament, is a revelation from God.

As to the difficulties and objections that may be urged against its divine authority, I think they are far from carrying in them any evidence or proof. For as to those which are of greatest weight, they do not affect the truth of the facts recorded, nor destroy at all the credibility of them. There have never been any objections offer'd that render it unlikely or improbable, that *Jesus Christ* lived an holy life, taught excellent doctrines, did many great miracles, died on the cross, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and poured down his spirit on his Apostles. And therefore whilst these facts, which support the credit of Christianity, stand upon

this sure foundation of certainty, I must necessarily believe the divine authority of the Christian Revelation, tho' the difficulties pretended were much greater than they are.

Some of them may arise either from not knowing some particular circumstances and customs referred to, from the shortness of the accounts which are delivered, or from some lesser errors that may have cast some obscurity on those accounts. But from whence soever they arise, they cannot invalidate the proof which arises from real and well-attested facts, nor make me doubt of things that stand upon the strongest foundation of evidence.

I find indeed that many things, which have appeared for a long while to wise and thoughtful men, as difficulties of great weight, have at length been fully cleared up, and set in a very plain and rational view ; and I therefore please my self with the hope, that in the course of providence, those things which still remain dark and perplexed may be explained, and set in a just light, and made appear as easy and consistent, as they are now obscure and intricate.

Besides, these difficulties which are pretended do not in the least affect the main and substantial parts of Christianity ; they do not cast any obscurity over the precepts, and promises, and principles of the Gospel, and of consequence do not affect my duty or my happiness. Notwithstanding all the objections that can be urged, I still find that the directions to serve God, and obey Christ, and secure my eternal salvation, are very obvious and plain ; and therefore I am not under any pain or fear upon account
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of things I do not understand, or cannot explain.

But what is of more importance, is, that the principal objections that are urged against the divine authority of the Christian Religion, are fairly to be answered, so as to give satisfaction to any impartial and unprejudiced mind. It hath been objected against the prophecies relating to Christ, that they are to be interpreted of him only in an *allegorical* and *mystical sense*, and that they are in their nature obscure, and do not so plainly point out the Messiah as might be expected and desired. Whereas the truth is, that tho' there may be a difficulty in interpreting some of them, yet that there are others, which are exceeding plain and clear, have an evident reference to Christ, do agree to the circumstances of no other person, are accomplished in him, and in him only. And if there are any prophecies, originally relating to other persons and things, applied to Christ, and the circumstances of his appearance and kingdom, they are never cited as originally belonging to Christ, but only as applicable to him in their proper meaning, and the times and events to which they are referred.

When 'tis objected against the miracles of Christ, that they were the effect of magick, this appears to be absolutely impossible; for it was never yet heard of, that magicians could raise the dead, and do the other wonderful works that *Jesus* did. Besides, the end of his miracles was so great and good, as a wicked impostor and magician can never be supposed to have in view; and till it can be shewn that the Christian Reli-

gion is a wicked religion, I must believe that the miracles recorded in the New Testament were wrought by an holy and good person, under the immediate influence of God.

If it be objected that some of the miracles recorded, are attended with some very absurd and improbable circumstances, I think this charge hath not, and cannot be proved. And from the late unsuccessful attempts that have been made this way, I have reason to believe, that the more the miracles of Christ and his Apostles are consider'd, they will appear more and more wonderful in themselves, and more worthy the interposition and assistance of God.

If it be objected, that there is no sufficient evidence or proof that these miracles were ever wrought, I apprehend this objection to be of little weight; because as there is the same ground of certainty for these, as there is for any other antient facts, which obtain universal belief, they deserve to be equally credited; and, I think, nothing can be more unreasonable and unfair, than to allow the same evidence to be sufficient as to some facts, and to deny the sufficiency of it as to others, which are equally possible in themselves, consistent with all the perfections of God, and designed to answer the most valuable ends and purposes amongst men.

If it be said that miracles are in their nature impossible, I think this can never be allowed but upon the supposition that all things are governed by, or rather subjected to an absolute and unalterable fatality. Because if the supreme and eternal cause of all things be possessed of liberty and power, the miracles recorded in the sacred writings

things are as possible to him as any other actions whatsoever, and according to my conception, much more easily perform'd than the work of creation, which is a much higher exertion of power, and is, by all sober deists, ascribed to the will and agency of God ; and of consequence I can never allow the impossibility of miracles, because such a notion appears to me destructive of the being and perfections of God.

As to the doctrines of Christ, if it be urged that some of them are unintelligible and mysterious, I have this to satisfy my self, that 'tis not much wonder if they should be so, because many of them relate to God, whom *none by searching can find out to perfection*, and that this is no more than may be objected against many of the most certain truths of natural religion. For whoever will enter into the consideration of the immensity and eternity of God's attributes, which certainly belong to him, will find himself lost in the infinite and boundless subject. As far as they are mysterious and incapable of being understood, I am sure that my acceptance with God doth not depend on my understanding them ; and as far as they are intelligible, they encrease my adoration, reverence, and love of God, awaken and excite me to the care and practice of godliness and virtue ; and thus help me on in my preparation for heaven and happiness.

If it be objected, that any of the doctrines of Christianity are irrational and absurd, I apprehend this hath never been proved by any of the enemies of the Christian Revelation. Many principles which they have endeavoured to expose

pose to ridicule, have not been the doctrines of the Gospel, but either their own mistakes, or the corrupt additions of weak and designing men to the simplicity of the truth of Christ. Other doctrines that have been excepted against, have not been revealed in their full extent and compass, and therefore can never be proved absurd by any particular inferences drawn from them; because those very inferences may themselves appear false and absurd, when the doctrines are placed in their full light, and men are rendered capable of clearly discerning, and fully understanding them. As to others which have been excepted against, they have stood their ground both against ridicule and malice, and the objections that have been urged have had no other effect, than to expose their own weakness, and to render the principles of the Gospel of Christ more evident and convincing.

¶ If it should be objected, that the very possibility of revelation it self may be questioned, I answer that this must be upon one or other of these suppositions; either that God himself, who hath established the order and course of nature, cannot vary from it, or else that 'tis not to be conceived how he should discover himself to any person, so as that he shall be sure it is God and no other.

If the former be asserted, that God himself cannot alter and vary from the course of nature, which he himself hath fixed, it will follow, that he was obliged by some external necessity to form all things as they are, or else by a fitness of things absolutely independent upon his own pleasure and will.

If the first be asserted, that God was obliged by some external necessity, or the agency of some Being prior and superior to himself; this is to assert eternity to be prior to it self, and infinite wisdom and power capable of being controuled by wisdom and power more than infinite; which is absurd.

If the latter be asserted, that God was obliged by a fitness of things independent upon his own pleasure and will, this will appear equally absurd; because, if he was under no external necessity to constitute the present frame, and consequently the present fitness of things, the actual constitution of the one and the other can be owing to no other cause or reason, but what is in God himself, and which therefore cannot be independent upon God; which cause or reason can be no other than the will of God, directed by the dictates of his own wisdom and goodness. And of consequence the present frame of things, and the fitness that results from it, is owing to the good pleasure and free choice of God, directed by the perfections of his own mind; which perfections do not destroy any natural power of acting or not acting, but only direct to the wisest and best use of it. The very essence of liberty doth indeed consist in wisdom to direct, and power to execute.

Hence it follows, that if the present frame of things be the result of the most perfect freedom and choice in God, the same free choice will and must take place, in every other circumstance to which perfect wisdom and goodness do direct. And therefore if it be agreeable to the dictates of such perfections in God, to vouchsafe an external

nal revelation to mankind, in the case of an universal ignorance and degeneracy, such a revelation is as possible as the original constitution of things, and may be accounted for upon the very same foundation of reason.

But if it be said, that it cannot be conceived how God can so discover himself to any person, as that he shall be sure it is God and no other; I answer, that supposing we are not able to describe the method by which God makes himself known to men, it will by no means follow, that 'tis impossible for God to do so, unless our conceptions are the measure of all possibilities. If God be the universal Creator, he is surely the Creator of the Souls of men, and hath implanted in them all their perceptive and reasonable powers and faculties; and of consequence being the former of spirits, he must be capable of acting on them, which sufficiently proves the possibility of revelation.

Besides, if, as the whole visible creation around us shews the possibility and great probability of, there are reasonable spirits of natures, orders, and powers superior to us; I suppose they will not be thought to be incapable of converse, and of communicating their ideas to each other; for this would be to suppose spirits less happy than men: and if created spirits can thus convey their minds to each other, so as that they shall be absolutely sure who it is they converse with, can it be imagined that God the infinite Spirit should not be able to convey his will to spirits, and reasonable beings, so as that they shall be sure that it is God who converses with them?

Nothing is more certain than that God, who is an absolute spirit, acts on the material world; and yet we cannot tell the manner how God acts upon it: and it is very wonderful to consider how one nature absolutely distinct, and of quite different attributes and properties from another, should thus continually act upon and influence it. But that spiritual beings, between whose natures, as spiritual, there is a necessary likeness and conformity, should act upon each other, and be capable of conversing with and communicating their ideas to each other, is a much more easy and rational supposition; and as probable, as that body should act upon body, of which the whole frame of the material world is an absolute, constant proof.

The account which revelation it self gives of the manner in which God convey'd his mind to men, is, either by an audible voice, attended with an appearance of visible glory, or else by making certain very clear and strong impressions on their minds. As to the former way, it is as reasonable to think that the voice and presence of God may be of so very peculiar a nature, as to be as well known, and as certainly distinguish'd as the voice and countenance of a friend: And as to the latter, it appears to me extremely probable, that impressions made on the mind may be attended with such peculiar circumstances, which may as truly and certainly discover God, as a friend may be known by his resemblance and image; or as tho' we were meer spirits, and God was conversing with us as such.

If it be allow'd that revelation is possible, it may be denied that it is necessary, because the natural

natural reason of men's minds is abundantly sufficient to demonstrate to them whatever God requires of them. I very readily grant, that the reasonable powers and faculties of men's minds are very capable of leading them into the knowledge of some of the most important truths that we are concerned to know, and duties we are obliged to perform ; and that men are criminal in the sight of God, if they run into ignorance and vice, thro' a neglect to improve those excellent faculties of reason which God hath given them.

But then it ought to be consider'd, that the powers of all men are not alike capable, and that tho' truths of importance when offer'd to them may be discerned and approved by them, yet that the generality would scarce ever have been able, by a long course of argument and inference, to have reasoned themselves into a clear knowledge of all those principles, which are necessary to be known, effectually to support the interest of true religion, and the practice of virtue ; especially if we consider them as wholly taken up with the affairs of the present life, educated with strong prejudices in favour of superstition and error, and trained up from infancy in idolatrous practices, and criminal courses. In such circumstances, what reason may be capable of doing, I know not : But that it hath not in fact led men to the knowledge of all the necessary principles and truths of religion, is evident from the history of almost all nations, who have been destitute of revelation : And therefore to argue against the necessity of revelation, because possibly men's own reason might have been sufficient without it, when in reality they did need it, is to set up meer suppo-

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fiction against positive fact, and to reason from possibilities against experience and certainty.

Reason, *i. e.* men's reasonable powers are unquestionably capable of great improvements, and of making very considerable discoveries, with proper assistance and cultivation. But without suitable helps and means of information, I apprehend that no man can affirm they would lead him into the knowledge of all the necessary principles of religion. *Cicero*, the greatest genius of the age in which he lived, did not owe his superior knowledge and wisdom to himself only. He had the writings of *Rome* and *Greece* to instruct and inform him. From these he understood the principles of the several sects of philosophers that were before him, the arguments with which they confirm'd their respective sentiments, and the objections that were urged by some against the schemes and principles of others. Upon this foundation it was easy to reason, and in whatever respects his sentiments were nobler than others, they were not properly the mere discoveries of his own mind, but inferences from, or the improvements of the discoveries and principles of others. And I cannot help thinking, that if any men are now capable of forming to themselves a compleat scheme of rational religion and morals, they owe it to the discoveries of the Gospel Revelation, tho' they assume the glory of it intirely to their reason.

Besides, tho' Reason might possibly discover the duties of religion and virtue without any revelation, it cannot in the nature of things certainly discover what the rewards of being religious and virtuous shall be. Reason will indeed in-

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form us, that a being perfectly virtuous, and who constantly acts agreeably to the reason and nature of things, without any deviation from it, cannot be finally miserable, but must be in some measure happy in the divine approbation and acceptance. But of what degree and duration that happiness shall be, depends wholly on the good pleasure of God. Being it self is the voluntary gift of the supreme cause, and of consequence the continuance of being must depend on his will who first gave it. And tho' perfect virtue will always be entitled to a proportionable reward from God, yet that such a being, and the happiness consequent upon his virtue, shall and must be of an everlasting continuance, can never be proved from the reason and nature of things; and of consequence the knowledge of it can be derived from nothing but the voluntary discoveries of God himself.

This I think is plain upon the supposition of a Being perfectly virtuous. But if any reasonable Beings deviate from the law of their creation, and act contrary to that fitness of things which reason assures them ought to be the rule of their actions; in such a case reason will be so far from giving any positive assurances of a reward, that it will rather lead men to the expectations and fears of punishment; there being as natural a connection between vice and punishment, as there is between virtue and a reward. Whether God will pardon, and upon what conditions, whether repentance and a sincere amendment for the future shall entitle to happiness, and especially the same happiness as would have been the reward of perfect virtue, here reason can never determine. And of

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consequence, if the certain knowledge of these important articles be in any sense necessary to encourage the repentance and reformation of men, it is in the same sense absolutely necessary they should have a revelation from God concerning them.

If it be objected, that to suppose the great expediency of revelation which is argued for, will infer that this revelation must be universal, and extend equally to all ages, nations, and persons, I think the answer is obvious and easy. Because, if there be any real weight in this objection, it will prove that God is obliged to be equally kind to all mankind, in all ages and nations without exception. If he is not obliged to bestow equal favours on all, he is not obliged to bestow equally on all, the particular favour of an external revelation. But if he is obliged to be equally, and at all times favourable to all, then he is obliged to be what in fact he scarce ever hath been, since the foundation of the world. He is obliged to give all men the same natural capacities, the same advantages for the discovery of truth, and the same external blessings of his providence. But is not this contrary to the experience of all ages, and a difficulty, if it be one, that affects the very being of a God, or at least the wisdom, goodness and equity of his providence, and which therefore is no more an objection against revelation, than it is against the first principles of natural religion it self.

If some parts of the world enjoy the benefit of a divine revelation, it can be no injury to others who do not ; because as God hath not vouchsafed to them that favour, they stand upon

the same foundation of the light of nature, as they would have done, had there been no extraordinary revelation at all. And as the enemies of revelation do themselves allow and plead for the absolute sufficiency of reason in all men, upon their own concession such as have no other guide but reason, can have no just occasion for complaint, and by necessary consequence, no claim to the higher benefit of a divine revelation : Because tho' God should think proper to vouchsafe it to some, and not to others, it doth not make the condition of such who have it not, any worse than it was before, by making any abatement in the natural sufficiency of their reason ; but they are exactly in the same state, and must be tried by the same law, as all the world would have been, had there been no other law but that of reason and nature. And therefore if those, who have this sufficient light of nature to direct them, cannot claim a divine revelation by any natural right, there can be no obligation upon God to grant it universally and alike. And if God can be under no obligation to grant it universally and alike, then it necessarily follows ; that as the granting it to some is no injury to others, no one being injured in not having what he hath no right of claim to, God may grant it at what seasons, and to what particular nations and persons, the circumstances of the world, and the ends of his government shall from time to time direct him.

The gospel revelation was certainly intended for the universal benefit of mankind, and accordingly the Apostles and first preachers of Christianity published it amongst all nations, where

where they went. But if the progress of it was hindered by violence and persecution, if some thro' prejudice and vice refused to embrace it; if others corrupted the simplicity and purity of it, till they had, in a great measure, or wholly lost it, and were left to embrace superstition and imposture in the room of it; and finally, if others, who have an opportunity of spreading the knowledge of the gospel, do for the sake of worldly advantages refuse to do it, the necessity of the gospel revelation's being universal may be allowed, without its being any reasonable objection against it, that in fact it is not so. Because this is not owing to any want of care or goodness in God, but to the negligence and vices of men themselves, for which I apprehend that neither the providence of God, nor the gospel revelation are or ought to be accountable.

If it be said, that supposing a revelation actually given, such revelation can be nothing but a revival of the principles and duties of natural religion, because men's acceptance with God can depend on nothing but their acting agreeable to the law of their reason and nature: I answer, that if by the principles and duties of natural religion, be meant such principles and duties, which when discover'd, appear reasonable to the minds of men, it may be allow'd that revelation doth not, and cannot place the happiness and acceptance of men with God, upon any thing that is not reasonable and fit for them to know and do, and of which they cannot in some measure discern the reasonableness and fitness; for then one certain mark of the truth of revelation would be plainly wanting, which is its placing the happiness of

men upon such a foundation as appears reasonable in it self, and therefore worthy of God, because I cannot believe that to be worthy of God, which by reason I cannot in some measure plainly discern to be so.

But if by the principles and duties of natural religion, be meant such principles and duties which natural reason, without any divine revelation, will lead men to the certain knowledge of, then the assertion is evidently false, that revelation can contain nothing but the principles and duties of natural religion. Because, as hath been observed, one great end of revelation is to give men certainty of such important principles as natural reason is never able to do.

If we consider men in circumstances of degeneracy, and as having acted contrary to the law of reason, a revelation meerly to revive the law of nature, would evidently be insufficient for their peace and happiness. For tho' this would be a direction of their future conduct, it would be no security to them against the punishment due to them for their past transgressions, which would prove the highest discouragement to their obedience for the time to come. And of consequence a revelation from God, vouchsafed to mankind in such circumstances, must contain more than the meer law of nature, *viz.* the method and conditions of God's extending his forgiveness to his sinful creatures; without which it would want one essential mark of its being from God, *viz.* its suitableness to the wants and necessities of mankind.

Besides, if God hath given men a revelation of his will, attended with sufficient evidence and

and proof, the belief of such a revelation is a moral duty, and a necessary instance of respect and reverence due to God ; it being as reasonable and fit, that I should attend to the voice and will of the Supreme Being in external revelation, as that I should submit to the voice and will of God by reason or internal revelation.

Upon this foundation depends that command of *Jesus Christ*: *Ye believe in God, believe also in me.* It is possible in hypothesis that men may govern their passions, and act well in society, who do not believe the Being of a God. But yet to *believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him*, is a principle of natural religion ; and, as I imagine, necessary to every man's happiness in the divine acceptance. And by consequence, if it be the will of God that I should believe in Christ, and if there be evidence to convince me of the reasonableness of believing in him ; it doth not seem more unreasonable that God should require me to believe in Christ, than it doth that he should require me to believe in himself, in order to my receiving a reward of grace and favour from him ; because if the sufficiency of evidence be a Reason for God's requiring belief in any case, it is a reason that will hold good in every one without exception.

Besides, if the observance of the religion and law of nature be allowed to dispose and prepare men for happiness in the favour of God, and tho' revelation cannot set aside the obligations of the one or other, but is principally designed to recover men to the knowledge of, and a conformity to the original fitness of things ; yet I apprehend that revelation may enforce the practice
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of them by such considerations, and motives, and special precepts, as have no certain foundation in natural reason and light, *i. e.* which men's reason would never have led them to have thought of, without a divine direction and command.

If the religion of nature be of God's constitution and appointment, and results from those relations which he himself hath been pleased to order and fix, I apprehend that such positive institutions which have a direct tendency to establish and promote men's regard to, and observance of it, may be ordain'd of God, and thereby become obligatory upon men. Because if the law of nature it self necessarily and universally obliges mankind, and their happiness depends on the observation of it; such institutions which render the observation of it more easy and practicable, however voluntary and positive in themselves, are consistent with all our notions of the divine perfections, and ought to be so far from being objections against the truth of any religion that contains them, that they are rather arguments in favour of it, as they are evident proofs of the wise and tender concern of God for the perfection and happiness of his creatures.

If then the peculiars of the Christian religion have all of them this tendency, as I apprehend they have, it follows, that God's requiring us to observe them is a reasonable and fit command, as it is a command resulting from his unerring wisdom, and his gracious regard to our welfare and interest. And therefore in this respect internal and external revelation, or the religion of nature and revelation may certainly differ, and the

the latter command what the former would never discover or oblige to.

If it be objected against the Christian revelation, that it is not explicate and clear, but that those who search it fall into very different sentiments and opinions as to several articles of importance, and that 'tis scarce to be supposed that God should be the author of a revelation, which, when given, is incapable of being understood; I have this that gives my mind satisfaction and ease: that if there are any intimations of doctrines in scripture, that sincere persons who do the will of God, and lay aside all prejudice, and desire to receive the truths of God as far as they can understand them, cannot, after all their endeavour and care, come to the certain knowledge of, the knowledge of such doctrines cannot be necessary to their acceptance and salvation; because Christ Jesus expressly declares, that *if any man doth the will of his father, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or no.*

As to those doctrines, upon the acknowledgment of which the New Testament writings do expressly make salvation to depend, I find, to my very great comfort, that they are very plain and intelligible in themselves; such as the existence of one God, the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and there being one Mediator between God and man, thro' whom God dispenses all blessings to his creatures. These and other truths of like importance are set in the clearest light, and if any have obscured and perplexed them by intricate distinctions, and philosophical speculations, the gospel of Christ gives
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no sanction to them, and the plain Christian hath no concern and business with them.

If it be said, that the Christian religion hath no better effect upon mankind than the light of nature had, and that therefore it can scarcely be imagined that God would be the author of so ineffectual an institution; I answer, that I suppose it can never be made appear that mankind are now as universally in the same circumstances of ignorance and vice, as they were before the revelation of the gospel.

The knowledge of one God, the universal Creator and Father, doth certainly more universally obtain than it did in the times of deep *Paganism* and *Idolatry*; the precepts of religion and virtue are more generally understood, and the rewards and punishments of a future life more certain as to their evidence, and more extensive as to the acknowledgment of them.

And tho' many who profess to believe these things act contrary to their own principles, yet there have been many in every age, and now are, who, under the influence of this faith, *live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world.*

And as to those who do not, 'tis not owing to the insufficiency of the principles and motives of Christianity, but to the want of consideration and a serious regard to them, and to those powerful habits which they have contracted, and continue to strengthen by a wilful and allowed indulgence.

And therefore, if the gospel be objected against as insufficient to reform men, and engage them to the love and practice of religion and virtue, it must be because it doth not necessitate
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and compel them, and lay an irresistible force on the mind to comply with it. Whereas, if this were the case, it would be an unanswerable objection against it, because this would destroy that freedom and choice of the mind, which is essentially necessary to give virtue it self its proper value, and render it capable of a reward from God. And of consequence, if the Christian religion contains every argument and motive, that is proper to be laid before and influence reasonable and free creatures, its not always proving effectual is no argument of its insufficiency, nor the least shadow of proof that it is not worthy of and actually from God.

And lastly, if it be objected that it hath been the occasion of such confusions, disorders, mischiefs and calamities in the world, as that it can never be imagined that God would be the author of an institution that should be attended with such fatal consequences ; I answer, That *genuine* Christianity hath never been the cause of any of the distractions and miseries that have afflicted mankind, since its entrance into the world ; tho' that which hath been substituted in the room of Christianity too often hath. Nothing is more visible and plain, than that the Christian religion is designed to calm the passions, and cure the vices of mankind. And if its principles were but duly attended to, and its precepts heartily submitted to, Christians would maintain the most excellent dispositions, and lead the most inoffensive and blameless lives ; and this world would be, what I please my self the next world shall be, an habitation of righteousness, peace and joy. The perfection of the Christian

istian law as to all its moral precepts, and important motives, abundantly justifies the wisdom and goodness of God in giving it ; and he is no more answerable for men's corrupting and abusing it, and refusing to act agreeable to it, than he is for their abusing the blessings of his common providence.

Upon a full view therefore of these and other objections, I think they are capable of a satisfactory answer ; and as the evidence for the truth and certainty of the Christian Religion stands in full force, I think my self bound to receive it as a revelation from God, and to regulate my faith, and hope, and practice by it.

XII.

AND that I might not be chargeable with partiality in my regards and attachment to Christianity, I have not only carefully examined the credentials it brings to prove its divine original, but I have also endeavoured honestly to compare it with other religions that are in the world, as far as I am capable of understanding and judging concerning them ; and this comparison confirms me in the belief of the Christian religion, and encreases my esteem and value for it.

Paganism carries in it innumerable marks of its impiety and falsehood. The number of gods it hath introduced, the superstitions it countenances, the impure and barbarous rites it warrants and prescribes, are demonstrative proofs it hath no foundation in the reason and nature of things, and cannot be the appointment of or agreeable to the will of God, the supreme unchangeable purity, wisdom and goodness.

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As to Mähometanism, tho' it pretends to the character of a revelation from God, yet it hath all the evident marks of a real imposture. The character of its author appears too suspected ever to support the honour of his being a messenger from God. His disclaiming miracles to attest the truth of his mission, is a plain acknowledgment of the weakness and falsehood of his pretences. The few wonderful things related of him appear at first view to be fable and romance. His forbidding enquiries into the nature and principles of his religion, evidently shews he was conscious to himself that it would not bear them. His propagating it by the sword, is proof sufficient that he knew it would not prevail with the weapons of reason and argument. The falsehoods it contains as to matters of fact, demonstrate the ignorance or wickedness of its founder. The indulgencies it gives to the appetites and sensual desires of men, is a strong argument of the badness of his own inclinations, and shews his resolution to sacrifice chastity and virtue to the more prevalent views of ambition and power. Many of his precepts are absurd and ridiculous, and unworthy the nature of true religion. And lastly, the motives and rewards set before men; and promised by him to encourage them to embrace and continue in his religion, are suited only to such whose minds are oppressed with sensuality, and enslaved to vice; no way worthy of the known perfections of God, nor any way suited to the rational spiritual nature of man. And of consequence a religion thus defective in its evidence, and false in its very constitution and frame, can

never be the institution of God, nor worthy of my reception and belief.

As to the *Jewish* religion, tho' this appears to have many genuine marks of its being the appointment of God, yet I find that it could not in its nature be intended for the religion of the world, because several of its precepts were such, as that by far the greatest part of the world could not possibly comply with them. It was an institution peculiar to one particular nation and country, and of consequence as such never did or could oblige the rest of mankind. And as it was calculated for one peculiar people, so it appears to have been constituted for a time only; the books themselves, which contain the accounts of it, intimating that the *scepter should depart from Judah*, that *another prophet should be raised up like to Moses*, and declaring that *the days should come when God would make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that he made with their fathers, when he took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt*. Besides this, there appear to be various prophecies relating to a more excellent and durable state of things, to commence under the government and reign of a particular person, foretold in different ages, described by various persons, as to the time of his coming, the place of his birth, the nature of his works, his sufferings and death, his resurrection and kingdom, and other remarkable events that attended him. And as these predictions and circumstances do all center in Jesus Christ, I plainly discern that *Judaism* is so far from demanding my submission to

to it, that it directs me to Jesus Christ, and is accomplished and perfected in him.

Upon all these accounts, I declare my self to be a Christian ; and am conscious that I have not taken up the profession of Christianity by chance, or in compliance with the custom of my country, or merely thro' the force of education : But as my faith is the result of a serious examination and impartial enquiry, and as I am persuaded that its pretences to revelation and a divine original are supported with all the strength of argument and proof, that the nature of the thing will bear, or a reasonable mind can desire, I think it both my duty and interest to submit to it as an institution from God. And till I can see the evidence of it disproved, or the religion of Christ it self demonstrated to be irrational and absurd, I am determined by the grace of God to hold fast my profession to the end, seeking after the kingdom of everlasting glory by the practice of that righteousness which prepares for and leads to it ; in a firm dependance upon the truth of that comfortable declaration of Jesus Christ, *That God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

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